

Gilston Area Workshop – 28th January 2017, Eastwick and Gilston Village Hall.

Attendees:

Facilitator
Jon Rowland (JR)
East Herts Council
Cllr Linda Haysey (LH) – Leader
Cllr Bob Brunton (BB) – District Councillor for Hunsdon Ward
Liz Watts (LW) – Chief Executive
Kevin Steptoe (KS) – Head of Planning & Building Control
Ben Wood (BW) – Head of Communications, Strategy & Policy
Claire Sime (CS) – Planning Policy Manager
Chris Butcher (CB) – Principal Planning Officer
Hertfordshire County Council
Jan Hayes-Griffin (JHG) – Assistant Director Planning and Economy
Neighbourhood Plan Group
Anthony Bickmore (AB) - Chairman
Cllr Bob Toll (BT)
Cllr Bernadette Dunthorne (BD)
Cllr Amanda Olsen (AO)
Cllr Mark Orson (MO)
Mike Newman (MN)
Janine Bryant (JB)
Landowners/Site Promoters
Mary Parsons (MP) – Places for People
Chris Lovegrove (CL) – City & Provincial Properties
Hugh Cave (HC) – City & Provincial Properties
Phil Murphy (PM) – Quod
Andy Hunt (AH) – Quod
Adina Bisek (ABi) – Grimshaw Architects
David Bird (DB) – Vectos
Bruce Fyfe (BF) – AECOM

1. Introductions

2. Gilston Area proposals

- 2.1 MP provided an overview of the Gilston Area proposals and noted that the expression of interest to secure funding for further technical work, submitted by East Herts, Harlow and Epping Forest Councils in relation to the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town, had been supported by Government. While the District Plan still needs to go through the Examination process in order to ascertain whether or not it is 'sound', the successful Garden Town bid, in the view of MP, raises the profile of development in the wider

Harlow area and may make it more likely that Government would be willing to support the delivery of strategic infrastructure schemes.

- 2.2 MP identified how their proposals adhere to Garden City principles, which she outlined and committed to supporting. It was also noted that Places for People are committed to delivering infrastructure up front at the earliest stages of development wherever possible. Examples were provided where this had been achieved including the Brooklands development in Milton Keynes.
- 2.3 PM then provided an overview of the District Plan in so far as it relates to the Gilston Area, including Policy GA1. He also identified that the purpose of preparing the Concept Framework was to summarise the vast amount of technical evidence that had been prepared, both by the site promoters and the Council, and to form the basis of more detailed masterplanning work in future. PM confirmed that the Concept Framework is in draft form at present, and that further work, undertaken with involvement from the local community (who had not, to date, been consulted on it), would be needed prior to the Examination of the District Plan in order to finalise it.
- 2.4 ABI gave a presentation on how the indicative masterplan for the Gilston Area had been conceived. A detailed analysis of landscape character and ecological/heritage assets had taken place. Other principles embedded within the indicative masterplan include protecting views from Hunsdon village and providing suitable landscape buffers between new development and the existing settlements of Eastwick and Gilston. A key aspect of the proposed scheme is to provide a substantial amount of public open space, including the area to the south of Gilston House which will form the 'centre piece' of the development.
- 2.5 AH then spoke about the importance of delivering infrastructure in the context of providing 54,000 homes within the wider housing market area. Places for People and CPP are both committed to providing a significant amount of new infrastructure on site, including education and health facilities. In addition, substantial financial contributions will be made to assist in the delivery of off-site strategic schemes including highways mitigation measures.
- 2.6 DB outlined the transport mitigation measures that would be required in order to deliver development across the wider Harlow area. These include the widening of the existing Stort crossing and a new eastern crossing. The importance of encouraging the use of sustainable transport was noted, including making provision for buses, walking and cycling. In particular, there is support from East Herts, Harlow and Epping Forest Councils for the delivery of a sustainable transport corridor running from the Gilston Area, through the town centre to potential development on the southern side of Harlow.

- 2.7 BF provided an overview of how the site would be serviced by water, gas, electricity and broadband. In terms of waste water, the site would be serviced by Rye Meads Sewage Treatment Works. The broad approach to mitigating flood risk was also explained.
- 2.8 AB provided some feedback to the introductory presentations on behalf of the Neighbourhood Plan group. He specifically reminded the meeting that the Group does not support the scheme and are engaging with the discussion only because East Herts had changed their position by removing their long standing support for the retention of the Metropolitan Green Belt in this location. The scheme offered no attraction to residents – only 30 years of building work and so disturbance. He commented that, of particular concern, was the apparent contrast between the idea of 7 distinct villages set into a rural landscape and the information that had been presented within the draft Concept Framework which seemed to talk about dense urban neighbourhoods as an exercise in creating a suburban area. In addition, it was noted that the draft Concept Framework had been prepared without any community engagement, despite there being a properly constituted Neighbourhood Plan group. AB also indicated that, in the view of many local people, previous developments such as Terlings Park had not been successfully delivered and the views put forward by the community, through their elected Parish Council, had been ignored.
- 2.9 MN reminded the meeting of the very strong concerns the community had about the capacity of strategic off-site infrastructure to cope with the proposed scale of growth, including the railway, Princess Alexandra Hospital and Rye Meads STW etc.; especially as, in their view, the systems are clearly overloaded already.
- 2.10 MP stated that the benefit of building at the kind of scale envisaged is that a significant investment can be made in off-site infrastructure, as well as the substantial amount of services and facilities that will be provided on site.
- 2.11 AO indicated that there needs to be legally binding commitments on infrastructure delivery as there is cynicism among the local community that the necessary services will not be provided once planning permission has been secured.

3. Breakout Groups

- 3.1 Four groups were set up to discuss specific topic areas. The feedback from each group was as follows:

Group 1: Site-wide and Strategic Infrastructure

- i) Sub-groups should be set up in order to discuss specific issues such as flooding, rail capacity etc. Such groups to consist of all relevant stakeholders who should be of sufficient level to make decisions etc. on behalf of their organisations.

- ii) Clearer understanding of the outputs of modelling and other assessment exercises so that the extent of infrastructure required is clearly identified e.g. clear information with regards to the need to increase capacity of strategic infrastructure such as Rye Meads STW, roads etc.
- iii) The mechanisms for delivery of capacity improvements need to be established.
- iv) The timing of delivery and any necessary phasing should be clearly set out.
- v) There needs to be more clarity on the level of information that is required for each stage i.e. what is required now at the plan-making stage and what should be included through masterplanning/planning application process.
- vi) There need to be legally binding agreements in place prior to (or as fixed criteria to) any planning approvals.
- vii) There needs to be agreement and clarity about phasing/speed of proposed development.

Group 2: Utilities, Flood Risk, Green Infrastructure and Climate Change

- i) It was noted that there are already flooding issues and more information is required on proposed mitigation.
- ii) There are mixed messages with regards to capacity of Rye Meads STW from Thames Water. Confirmation is required from Thames Water that Rye Meads has sufficient capacity to cater for the cumulative impact of growth within its catchment, both during the Plan period and beyond.
- iii) Community benefits should be delivered such as broadband and mains gas for existing villages.
- iv) There needs to be clarity about what further ad-hoc development may come forward beyond the 10,000 Gilston Area scheme. The local community would like re-assurance that there will be no other development in the Gilston area, and that the current proposals are contained.
- v) There are positives in the proposals and these should not be lost e.g. high quality design.
- vi) Support was expressed for proposals contained within the document entitled 'Gilston Great Park – A Proposal for Actively Managed Countryside North of Harlow, October 2006'.

Group 3: Social and Community Infrastructure

- i) The current deficit in infrastructure must be taken into account; new services and facilities should not be planned with only new residents in mind i.e. a number of pupils currently have to attend school in Hoddesdon.
- ii) New facilities for education and health etc. should be flexible in order to ensure that they are 'future proofed'.
- iii) There needs to be 'early wins' for the local community such as broadband and green infrastructure.

- iv) Lessons should be learnt from previous developments. Terlings Park redevelopment didn't provide any benefits to the existing community and does not, in planning terms, integrate as well as it could have done had a more positive approach to community engagement been taken.
- v) There should be support for new ways of working including home-working.
- vi) The issue of governance is important.

Group 4 – Highways and Transport

- i) In order to encourage people to use sustainable forms of transport, an excellent public transport system is required from the earliest stages of development in order to provide a real alternative to the car.
- ii) Engagement is required with Harlow Council in order to discuss their regeneration aspirations for Harlow town centre. An excellent town centre offer is more likely to encourage people to use buses to get there rather than cars.
- iii) More certainty is required with regards to the funding and delivery of strategic road infrastructure schemes.
- iv) Consideration should be given to different funding sources, including the potential to 'forward fund' key infrastructure schemes in order to deliver them earlier on in the development process.
- v) There is concern among existing residents that development could have a significant impact on rural roads, as well as those within Harlow.
- vi) The successful Garden Town bid could be used to attract significant Government funding that may allow for the delivery of more ambitious transport schemes.
- vii) The quality of education provision within the Gilston Area needs to be excellent in order to ensure that people don't travel by car to access schools elsewhere e.g. Ware.

4. Community Agenda

4.1 AB re-iterated that the Gilston Area proposal is not supported locally, however the community is willing to engage in a constructive manner, despite the support now being given by East Herts for the removal of the long established Green Belt policy here. AB identified a number of outstanding issues in terms of how the proposals adhere to Garden City principles, notably:

- Community engagement: the local community requires professional support in order to engage effectively in the process; the matters are complex and the community needs professional support.
- Land value capture: What does this really mean for this development and where is the legal commitment?

- Community ownership: What will this involve and when will the governance structures be established? The community need independent legal advice on a matter as complex as this.
- Any potential development should be designed to deliver maximum benefit to existing residents and delivered in such a way as to minimise disruption to existing residents.

5. Conclusions and Next Steps

- 5.1 LH said that the Council understands the concerns of the local community. The proposed scale of development, and the successful Garden Town bid for the funding of further technical work, provides an opportunity to have conversations with Government about strategic infrastructure requirements. LH stated that the Council was committed to ensuring that the development will be of the highest quality, and that this would be achieved by all parties working together.
- 5.2 It was agreed that it would be appropriate to invite Harlow Council to future workshops in a careful and considered way, however the issue of governance should be discussed first. LW noted that there are probably two distinct elements of governance that need to be thought through; the wider Garden Town (related to the successful DCLG funding bid), and the Places for People/CPP site itself. Both need to interact with each other in order to get the best overall outcome. All parties were invited to put forward discussion papers on the subject. It was agreed that the next workshop should be set up in the near future specifically to discuss governance.

CLOSE.

Discussion notes from Group 2: Utilities, Flood Risk, Green Infrastructure and Climate Change

Group members: Mark Orson, Amanda Olsen, Bruce Fyfe, Claire Sime, Ben Wood

Key points from discussion:

1. **Flooding:** The area around the Stort already floods on a regular basis and further re-assurance is needed regarding flood mitigation. Nitrate run off into waterways from farmland is a current issue. This will be reduced if farmland gives way to new housing developments. However, management of water drainage will be a risk and consideration should be made of permeable or porous hard surfaces for use in the new developments.
2. **Sewage capacity:** There have been mixed messages from Thames Water in past years regarding Rye Meads capacity. The lack of capacity at Rye Meads was one of the principal reasons that previous proposals for large scale development in the Gilston area was rejected. Confirmation from Thames Water is needed that Rye Meads can cope with the aggregate capacity increases for the areas that it serves during the plan period, and beyond. If work is required to increase capacity this should be identified including costs and commitment to funding. Rye Meads is close to areas of SSSI and confirmation is needed that these areas will not be impacted by work to expand Rye Meads capacity.
3. **New utilities:** most existing properties in the area do not have mains gas or superfast broadband. Many do not have mains sewage. If new areas are to have these facilities then it is reasonable to expect that existing properties will also be connected and this should be an obligation on the developer. Confirmation is required that electricity and other service provision will be underground and there will be no new electricity pylons.
4. **Additional development:** the group would like reassurance that there will no other development around the Gilston area and that the current proposals are contained. The proposals show that the new housing will contribute significantly to targets up to 2033 and beyond. There is an expectation that no additional developments will 'spring up'. The area is already being radically changed and the group wants to ensure that other landowners adjacent to the new developments are not given planning approval for what will amount to infill development of the existing settlements and GA1 proposals.
5. **Green Infrastructure:** The Gilston Great Park proposal identifies a number of strategic principles that can be applied to the green infrastructure in this area and should be referenced. The Gilston Great Park proposal was written to provide an alternative vision of land use rather than development with the objective of providing *"attractive, distinctive, accessible, diverse and multi-functional network of green spaces and links, landscapes, biodiversity and heritage assets in and around Harlow that seeks to meet the social and environmental needs of all communities"*.

Notes on detail and other discussion

1. The group also raised the issue of the state of the waterways and the ability for ponds and brooks to cope with varying water levels in the case of flash floods. Fiddlers Brook floods the road annually making it impassable at times. Particular issue raised around the lake which is in possession of a private landlord in the middle of the proposed developments. The lake is not well tended and covered in reeds (in all but the landowner's bank). It was felt that a comprehensive view of flood mitigation could not be taken without engaging the landlord. Amanda and Mark willing to help broker an initial conversation. The lake also borders farmland owned by Places for People and this is designated to be new parkland. The PfP bank is overgrown and covered in bushes. Does PfP own this bank or does the lake owner? Could PfP clear the bank and could park users have access to it? This all needs to be identified and the owner of the lake should be engaged in this process at the earliest convenience. Perhaps PfP could offer to maintain the lake going forward? The lake owner needs careful handling. When Gilston Park House was converted the developer, City and Country, started clearing the reeds from the part of the lake that joins our lawn and the lake owner arrived and stopped them. The lake owner was furious that they had not been asked. I suspect if City and Country had asked permission they would have said yes.
2. The group were keen to highlight that some aspects of the proposals are positive and these should not be lost. For example the proposed village locations are sympathetic to existing villages (e.g. in terms of proximity to existing homes and to historic monuments). There proposed new roads also appear to show that a lot of commuting traffic will be kept out of village high streets. The proposals for local shopping areas and facilities are also welcome. The group were keen for these elements to be retained as the plans take further shape and also willing to visit other places that have seen similar developments to observe how they look in practice.
3. The overall look and feel (design) of the new villages is very important. The group had some concerns that the design may be similar to Harlow and would prefer a genuine village feel. Being involved in the design guides and master plans is key. We would prefer the creation of pretty traditional villages rather than ugly urban sprawl. Ensuring new houses have enough residents parking and visitor parking is key to avoid parking disputes and pavements covered in cars. We have seen this in Harlow and also in many new housing developments.